Gender discrimination in academic literature: Reflection from Punjab Textbooks

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Abstract

The study has been made to explore the gender representation of male and female in the textbooks of Urdu language taught at primary level in Punjab. It aimed to find out the different aspects of gender disparity, representation of male and female in ratio, also tried to identify the construction of gender roles and stereotypical representation of gender. The literature reflects a clear discrimination in representation as female were less represented as authors as well as in the titles and characters of the stories written in textbooks. The roles of women were limited and their engagement in social life was traditional which construct a traditional division of labor. Men showmanism was a dominant characteristic which further contribute to gender discrimination and stereotyping.

Key words: Gender stereotype, textbooks, gender discrimination, Urdu

Introduction

The aim of this study was to investigate stereotypical representation of male and female in text book. Texts books which are being taught at primary level were chosen for analysis. The research question deals with the biased representation of male and female in the text books. Academic literature plays a vital role in the education system of any society. Text books are being designed by the legitimate authorities, as text books are being designed by under governmental supervision. Women are being less represented in text books all over the world. As most policies and agendas are being designed by men including representation of women, the images in text books are limited in scope and merely gender stereotypes. Many research studies focusing on the representation of women, gender roles and gender stereotypes by analyzing the images and grammar in text books of higher level and overall pattern of the study now a days. This study focused on primary text books because this is the start of the formal learning of an individual and these books provide a base for the next learning in life.

Text books contain worldwide ideas in it and give understanding of any culture. Text book are of many types e.g. published by different publishing houses. This research work considers only the text books published by Punjab text board. Crease (2009) states, “text books seem like treasures, spotted in the rough by some discerning individual, plucked and examined, placed in the grand storehouse of knowledge, passed on from generation to generation. This is a convenient a way to present scientific discovery, and useful for textbooks, that it can be called the treasure –hunt picture of knowledge”.

Textbooks are the main source of information about the culture of the society but these books are also play a role as agent of socialization as they form the personalities of young individuals. Women are stereotypically represented in textbooks, inferior to men in cultural stories of the textbooks and they are underrepresented in the textbooks. The textbooks shows the image of women in our culture and represent stereotypical gender roles and different identities which are defined and create by our patriarchal system. Result shows that women are being assigned inferior roles on the other hand important roles and responsibilities are affiliated with male members.
In the recent times, the issue of gender stereotype in textbooks is being considered as an issue to be researched. As with the passage of time the status of women is changed and still changing and effort are being made to eliminate gender discrimination in every aspect of life. Different studies are being conducted which shows that children have a strong concept of discrimination in their minds. Governmental are trying to eliminate the discrimination in literary material but still gender stereotypical representation is present in textbooks.

**Objectives**
- Whether the representation of both male and female is equal or not.
- 2. What kind of images are being used for male and female.
- 3. Whether the representation of both male and female in Punjab textbooks are stereotypical or not.

**Research question**
- How the gender is being represented in our textbooks and whether there is any existence of stereotype in our text books or not?

**Review of Literature**
Jack line and Michael (1973) as quoted in Fresnel and Frost (1977) analyzed stories in textbooks and found that the stereotype in portrayal of male and female role has been increased with grade level studies. Women and girls are less represented in and they are engaged in different activities than boys and men. The representation is not equal. Girls are being portrayed in a way that they are some show piece. Men are represented a lot they are considered as the persons who construct and produce things. They have more problems solving attitude they are engaged in various kind of hard work activities. Researcher is also interested in gender representation in textbooks and whether gender stereotype exist in our textbooks are not.

Woodward (1998) claims that girls are less absent from the class as compare to the boys. Mostly girls stay in schools for whole day, that's why they take much better grade than boys. Although boys perform good in science and math’s subject but girls as well Perform well in these subject’s boys take less courses in their studies than girls. Researcher also mentions the issue of gender biasness in text which are part of literary courses. Empirical evidences show that girls are performing better than boys but still there are discriminating martial in our overall setup and text books are reflecting this situation. As in this article researcher was interested in making an analysis. About gender biases which are prevailing in society. Researcher also want to find out the gender biases in our literary martial.

**Methodology:**
The main source of the research was the primary textbooks of Punjab text board. As the source of my data collection was secondary, secondary data collection method was used. It is been assumes that gender stereotype is present in. The selected books were only the textbooks of primary level, purposive sampling from non-probability sampling was used. The sample of this research study consists of five books, five books of Urdu. Researcher used these books to find out the answers of the question on which this study is based. Heather the information researcher got by analyzing these books providing support to the researcher's perception or not. As this research will deals with the textbooks, and find out the question about gender representation in textbooks so qualitative method was used for data analysis. Qualitative method is a method which is used for telling the whole story. Qualitative method involves deep understanding of human behaviors the topic like gender inequality or underrepresentation of women in textbooks which cannot be quantified it can just analyzed well through qualitative analysis. Qualitative research method relies on description and explanation. Also deals with the question such as why and how the decision is taken. Textbooks were analyzed to get the answers of the questions such as what kind of lexis and grammar is used for men and Women.
The second question was about the images and lexis present in Punjab textbooks at primary level or not. Researcher adopt Qualitative Content Analysis as Critical Discourse Analysis is used there there is comparison of two groups. According to van Dijk (1998a) Critical Discourse Analysis is a field that is concerned with studying and analyzing written and spoken texts to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias. It examines how these discursive sources are maintained and reproduced within specific social, political and historical contexts.

Data
Selection of textbooks:
The major focus of research was to find out the answer to the question that whether there are some gender stereotype exist in our textbooks or not. It was being assumed by many people that there is some kind of gender biased material in our learning material. The reason behind selecting these books was that the textbooks which are taught at primary level set the minds of individuals as it is the starting point of every individual's formal learning in social life. The books of elementary level or college level have no strong effect on the minds of Individuals as primary level books do. Because the mind of children is not mature enough. The reader accepts the information which matches with the knowledge which learners have been taught in his early life, especially at primary stage of life. The ideas which are being, given in early learning make a strong impact on individual's mind and makes the person fanatic about their beliefs. Many researchers worked on the textbooks at secondary, elementary and college level to point out the gender differences in that level. Researcher selected the primary textbooks because they provide a basic source of information for the formal learning process.

Data Analysis:
The selected books were deeply to find out the answers of the question which was mentioned earlier. Primary textbooks were studied thoroughly, It was explored that men are overrepresented in short stories and also in the poems. It seems that it has become a stereotype that all important valuable, and impressive characters were being done by male members. Whereas women were being less represented in textbooks. In comparison between men and women represented in textbooks it was clear that men were being represented as wise and experienced as compare to the women.

Representation of male and female in textbooks:
In these books of Urdu there were thirteen stories which were about famous personalities. Eleven of them were about male personalities and only two stories were on female personalities. There were females who were great in themselves but they were not mentioned in these books. The stories in these books were personality oriented such as there was a specific character and the whole story evolve around that single character. There were four or five poems in each book, and all of them were written by male poets. Overall the representation of male and female was biased and unequal.

Attribute fixed for male and female (Qualities)
In the book of Urdu of class two there was a story Bary Logou k Bari Batain (Great stories of great people). The story contains quotations of wisdom, the whole story consists on a brief introduction of Sheikh Sadi and his quotations. This single story in the book was about wisdom and great saying, all of which belong to a single male “Sheikh Sadi”. There was a story called “Aqwal-e-Zarein” (Golden Words) in the book of class three. That contains quotations of Hakeem Luqman. There was a poem in the book of class three titled “Chota Sa Larka” (A little boy). Which evolve around a boy. This poem tells about the qualities of good boy who should be good in studies and sports. There was no poem or story which talked about any female. There was a story titled “Nanha Muhafiz” (Small bodyguard) which was about a boy who was very brave. This boy went to his school where he found a bomb, he informed to principal about it and in this way, he save everyone. The quality of being brave is especially associated with males and such examples are present in our textbooks which strengthen gendered attributes. There was a poem titled “Barhurdar” (Son) which was also about a boy. There was a poem titled “Ankh ka Tara” (Apple of eye)
which was also about a boy. The poem starts with “Atif Acha Bacha hai” (Atif is a good boy). This poem was also about the qualities of a good boy.

Fixed roles and profession for male and female
In the book of Urdu of class two and class five there were two stories titled “professions” in which there was information about different professions. The word which was being used in this was aadmi (man) for description. The man who drops students in school is called driver, man who is in hospital is doctor, similarly the man who work in fields is called farmer. There was description about different professions but with each and every profession the word “Aadmi” (man) was used. There was no representation of female in any profession.

Both of these above mentioned stories with same title (professions). The story which is part of class two was more gendered and biased than the other story which is part of class five. Gender stereotype at sentence level was also present in academic literature. In the book of Urdu of class two there was a picture story titled “Khail he Khail” ( In sports) in which there were only pictures about different sports. There were separate pictures in which boys were playing cricket, football and hockey whereas girls were playing Kikli, Shatapou, and other such indoor games.

Females are playing all games on national and international level today, but in these text books there was stereotypical representation of sports activities of male and female. There are different instances of stereotypical expressions in the books of class. In the book of Urdu there is a story titled as Hifazat (Protection).It is about cleanliness and developing cleaning habits in children. Very interestingly all characters in this story are females. The character of grandmother showed instructing little girls about the significance of cleanliness. Again grandmother of the girls is shown as making the girls neat and clean.

Dari jan ne Ramesha kay nakhan kat kar hath dulwayne. Rumal se nak saf ke.
Ami ne usay nehlaya aur saf kapray pehnaye. (urdu Text)
‘Grandmother cut the nails of Ramsha and washed her hands. She wiped her nose with handkerchief.
Mother gave her shower and dressed her with neat and tidy clothes’.

Other such another stereotypical sentence in the textbook of Urdu of class two are as under:
‘Bilal ke ami ghar ke kam kari hain . (urdu Text)
‘Bilal’s mother does household work’

Gender stereotypical representation exists in the class 3 books as well. There are sentences is a story “Dohri Khushi” (Double Happiness)
Ami bawarchi khane mein khana paka rahi the . (urdu Text)
Mother was cooking food in the kitchen
Abu America mein hotay hain . (urdu Text)
Father does work in America

Here the roles are again fixed. It means the mother is only cooking and responsible for all households work and father is to earn money for all expenditures. It is further shows all indoor works are confined to the women. Their life is limited between the four walls of house. All out-door jobs are specified for men.

Main ap k mamu ko phone karti hue k who aj he hamari liye setain buk karwa dain (Urdu text)
I call your uncle and ask him to reserve seats for us

In the above given sentence, the dialogue shows dependence of female on male member. A woman cannot go outside her home. It is the division of textbooks which is inserted in the minds of the students. It can be said that this kind of discourse has great importance in creating gender inequality.

Analysis of Images
This sentence shows that females are best caretaker and it is the duty of the females as in this story grandmother and mother are doing this duty to nourish the children. They are supposed to be responsible for making them healthy and clean. Not even a single male character is shown in this story to share the responsibility of training children.
In the book of Urdu of class three there was a story titled “Pakistan k Sobay” (Provinces of Pakistan), there were pictures of boys who were wearing traditional clothes. There was no representation of female in these pictures as well.

Researcher find while analyzing the books that the representation of both male and female is not equal. There is a huge difference between the ratio of the representation.

As women are being underrepresented in all fields of life the same is the case in education. These books are not balanced about gender representation. The findings of the study suggest that the gender is stereotyped in textbooks. Their roles and profession were divided in the textbooks.

**Discussion:**

The main concern of this research was to explore the concept of gender in Punjab textbooks. Researcher choose primary books for this purpose as it is the starting point in any individual’s formal learning process. There were three main objectives, to find out the ratio that whether the representation of male and female is equal or there is discrimination as we observed in all other fields of life. The second thing that researcher want to explore was that what kind of language is used for male and female as they are being treated equally or there is some discrimination with any of them. The third objective of the research was to find out that there is a pre-assumed assumption about the representation of gender in textbooks. Generally, it is being assumed that the language of our textbooks is gender biased and we can considered this language as stereotyped language.

Results suggest that the representation of both male and female is not equal. There is a huge difference between the ratio of the representation. As calculated in percentage the females are not represented more than 20% in the textbooks. On the other hand, men are being overrepresented as the remaining percentage (80%) is about men. There is a large number of those stories which are about some male personalities but the female representation is rare. As women are being underrepresented in all fields of life the same is the case in education. These books are not balanced about gender representation.

The second objective of the researcher was to find out what kind of language is being used and the other thing which was the purpose of the study was to explore that whether there is existence of any kind of stereotype or not.

When we talk about the language there are many words and sentences which shows a gender biased there is another element which is important is that there are certain attributes which are specifically being related to one sex. The roles are being fixed for both male and female. All this kind of discrimination creates a harmful effect of children who study these books.

The main focus of the study was to explore the concept of gender in Punjab textbooks. Research takes the concept of gender and then make an analysis after deeply studying those textbooks which were relevant to the study.

The research question that how the gender is being represented in our textbook. As they are equally represented in the textbooks or there is some discrimination on the representation issue. The other objective was to point out the gender stereotypical representation of women at word level and at sentence level. To fulfill this objective a linguistics analysis was conducted.

The findings of the study suggest that both the gender is stereotyped in textbooks. Their roles and profession were divided in the textbooks. There are some jobs which are for male. These textbooks offer gender stereotyped knowledge to the learners and we know, there is an internal relationship between the minds of the students and the contents of the textbooks. Data found that the image in the textbooks were also stereotypical. These images represent the classifications of the roles.

This is a fact that women are taking part in all fields of life. In history women took part in different movements but they were not represented aggressively in the syllabus due to male dominated society of that time. The ratio of female participation in worldwide roles and professions increased than past times. if such participation would be represented in a healthy manner, then people come to know about the value of the women in a society.

This is another way of implication; working women should be represented positively specially in male dominated areas and fields. In this way, the learner of the textbooks would get awareness that the work which is associated with the male can be also done by the females. For this purpose, seminars
workshops should be conducted for the acknowledgment of the efforts and struggle done by women leaders. Government should award those women who had done great adventures tasks and hard work for the country they should be represented in textbooks as women of substance. These text books should be revised by the government properly. The images and text which appreciate the valour and courage of women should be included in the text books. This would be the proper way to make the mind of children balanced about male and female.

**Recommendations**

- Government should consider this issue and should eliminate this kind of biased materials from the text.
- There should be an equal representation of both male and females in the course, this would be encouraging for females.
- Females also have achievements and success stories that must be highlighted in the text books.
- Education sector which is one of the most important, so there should be elimination of such gender biased elements.

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